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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 001414

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/16/2017  
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [YM](#)  
SUBJECT: SAADA: CEASEFIRE FRAGILE, BUT HOLDING

REF: SANAA 1022

Classified By: CDA ANGIE BRYAN, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The security environment in Saada remains tense with continuing minor clashes, but the tenuous ceasefire is holding and there have been no reports of major fighting. Qatar's recall of its delegation from the Saada ceasefire implementation committee is a major step backwards. Information coming from Saada remains ambiguous and reports that al-Houthis are vacating military positions and conducting limited weapons turn-ins could be important first steps in establishing security or concessions designed to mask repositioning and regrouping of forces in preparation to renew major fighting. Abdul Malek al-Houthi and his military commander remain in Saada with no indication they intend to repatriate to Qatar. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Charge received Saada updates from Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi during a 7/15 courtesy call, and from Interior Minister Alimi, 7/17, during a visit with Admiral Fallon. Foreign Minister al-Qirbi offered the general assessment that the ceasefire was "partially working". He added that President Saleh is committed to the Saada agreement as well as granting amnesty to al-Houthi supporters. Alimi offered the view that in spite of numerous violations, the al-Houthis had recently taken some positive first steps. However, during a 7/17 LEGATT meeting with Deputy Minister of Interior Sunaidar, Sunaidar stated his belief that the al-Houthis were using the ceasefire agreement to regroup and prepare for a resumption of combat operations.

Tensions Remain

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¶3. (SBU) Alimi commented that the al-Houthis have committed 200 violations since the President's May 22 Unity Day statement declaring a cessation of hostilities and were responsible for 13 security personnel deaths, 123 injuries, four civilian deaths, and the destruction of two houses. He stated that last week the implementation committee decided to withdraw from Saada out of frustration with the lack of progress, but President Saleh ordered them to stay. Alimi stated that there are 2,000 ideologically committed al-Houthis, supported by 3,000 others who were willing to fight for the al-Houthi cause. He identified another 5,000 sympathizers willing to give material aid but not fight, for a total of 10,000 al-Houthi supporters. (COMMENT: An Embassy officer at the meeting interpreted Alimi's 10,000-man estimate as a reference to al-Houthi supporters in or near the Saada governorate. END COMMENT.)

#### Qatari Delegation Attacked and Recalled

14. (SBU) Local media outlets reported that a ceasefire implementation committee convoy which included Qatari representatives was ambushed on Sunday, 7/15, wounding two bodyguards. During a 7/18 meeting with Embassy officers, the Qatari Charge confirmed that the attack occurred and that the Qatari delegation was unharmed. Government media outlets blamed al-Houthi supporters, but opposition, independent, and Islah party online news sites reported a statement by Abdul Malek al-Houthi condemning the attack and categorically denying any involvement by al-Houthi supporters.

15. (U) The Qatari Embassy confirmed on 7/23 that it recalled its delegation serving on the implementation committee from Saada for "further consultation and evaluation of the situation". Qatari Embassy contacts added that the delegation is in Sanaa as of 7/23 and will depart for Qatar the same day.

#### Limited Weapons Turn-in

16. (SBU) Both al-Qirbi and Alimi stated that on a limited basis, the al-Houthis are turning in weapons. The independent "Al Ayyam" online outlet reported that al-Houthi negotiators in Duhyah agreed on Sunday 7/15 to turn in weapons. The GPC website reported on 7/16 that the ceasefire implementation committee was supervising the turnover of

SANAA 00001414 002 OF 002

al-Houthi weapons. (COMMENT: DAO contacts report no medium or heavy weapons have been turned in. END COMMENT.)

#### Al-Houthis Vacating Some Positions

17. (SBU) Interior Minister Alimi said that "the Houthis are coming down from the mountains". This view has been supported by reports from local government and independent media beginning on 7/13 that al-Houthi supporters vacated three positions and relinquished control to government forces in the vicinity of Majz, northwest of Saada. Local independent media reported Yasir al-Awadhi, the official spokesman from the implementation committee, saying that al-Houthi forces vacated one of their most important positions, Um Layla Mountain located 60 kilometers northwest of Saada. He considered this to be among "the most important achievements of the implementation committee and an important confidence-building measure".

#### Prisoner Release

18. (C) Media outlets recently reported that the al-Houthis released approximately 60 prisoners as a goodwill gesture, but continue to hold 90 others. An Embassy contact whose brother is a senior officer in the Northwest Area Command and works closely with its commander Ali Muhsin also reported that the prisoner release occurred. The contact, who owns two large farms in Saada seized by the al-Houthis during the fighting, stated that the al-Houthis recently returned the farms, but stripped the insides of valuables and family heirlooms.

#### Relief Operations Continue Amidst Security Concerns

19. (SBU) The International Committee for the Red Cross

(ICRC) continues to restrict its operations to Saada City out of security concerns. Since the May 2 attack on their convoy enroute to Baqim, northwest of Saada, they have not resumed aid operations to an estimated 2,300 families located in remote locations throughout the governorate. The ICRC and the Yemen Red Crescent Society estimate there are a total of 8,000 families or approximately 56,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Saada Governorate. (COMMENT: ICRC uses a baseline of seven persons per family. END COMMENT.) They continue to provide non-food aid (blankets, water cans, soap, water) and primary health care through five mobile clinics to 5,700 families located in or near Saada. They operate two camps in Saada: Al Anad camp that holds 2,000 families, and a smaller camp housing 96 families. They report that the remainder of the internally displaced persons not in camps continue to live with host families in or near Saada. (COMMENT: The United Nation's World Food Program is reporting 3,550 registered internally displaced families (24,850 persons) in or near Saada City. END COMMENT.)

110. (C) COMMENT: No major fighting has occurred in Saada since the Qatari-brokered peace deal was struck in mid-June although the security situation remains tense and sporadic fighting, like the attack on the ceasefire implementation committee convoy, continues. We will continue to monitor the Qatari recall of its delegation and its impact on the ceasefire negotiations, but we view this development as a step backwards in establishing a stable security environment. Reports that the al-Houthis are leaving the mountains and their relinquishment of Um Layla Mountain stronghold represent important first steps overshadowed by the possibility that Deputy MOI Sunaidar could be right: they could be concessions designed to mask the regrouping and repositioning of al-Houthi forces and preparations to renew major fighting. Reports of an al-Houthi prisoner release and limited weapon turn-ins are also positive signs even though they came on the heels of four extensions to a turn-in deadline and threats by the implementation committee to return to Sanaa. Abdul Malek al-Houthi and his military commander Ruzaimi remain in Saada with no indication that they intend to repatriate to Qatar. We note that the ICRC's decision to restrict relief operations to the vicinity of Saada City is indicative of the tense security situation and tenuous nature of the ceasefire. END COMMENT.  
BRYAN